



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 1205

[AMS-CN-12-0059]

Cotton Research and Promotion Program: Procedures for Conduct of Sign-up Period

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: This proposed rule would amend the rules and regulations regarding the procedures for the conduct of a sign-up period for eligible cotton producers and importers to request a continuance referendum on the 1991 amendments to the Cotton Research and Promotion Order (Order) provided for in the Cotton Research and Promotion Act (Act) amendments of 1990. The amendments would update various dates, name changes, addresses, and make other administrative changes.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before **[INSERT DATE 10 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

ADDRESSES: Written comments may be submitted to the addresses specified below. All comments will be made available to the public. Please do not include any personally identifiable information (such as name, address, or other contact information) or confidential business information that you do not want publically disclosed. All comments may be posted on the Internet and can be retrieved by most Internet search engines. Comments may be submitted anonymously.

Comments, identified by AMS-CN-12-0059, may be submitted electronically through the *Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>*. Please follow the instructions for submitting comments. In addition, comments may be submitted by *mail or hand delivery to* Cotton Research and Promotion Staff, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, 100 Riverside Parkway, Suite 101, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 22406. Comments should be submitted in triplicate. All comments received will be made available for public inspection at Cotton and Tobacco Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, 100 Riverside Parkway, Suite 101, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 22406. A copy of this notice may be found at: www.regulations.gov .

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Shethir M. Riva, Chief, Research and Promotion Staff, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, 100 Riverside Parkway, Suite 101, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 22406, telephone (540) 361-2726, facsimile (540) 361-1199, or email at Shethir.Riva@ams.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Executive Order 12866 and Executive Order 13563

Executive Orders 12866 and 13563 direct agencies to assess all costs and benefits of available regulatory alternatives and, if regulation is necessary, to select regulatory approaches that maximize net benefits (including potential economic, environmental, public health, and safety effects, distributive impacts and equity). Executive Order 13563 emphasizes the importance of quantifying both costs and benefits, reducing costs, harmonizing rules, and promoting flexibility. This action has been designated as a “non-significant regulatory action” under section 3(f) of Executive Order 12866. Accordingly, the Office of Management and Budget

(OMB) has waived the review process.

Executive Order 13175

This action has been reviewed in accordance with the requirements of Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. The review reveals that this proposed rule would not have substantial and direct effects on Tribal governments and would not have significant tribal implications.

Executive Order 12988

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. It is not intended to have retroactive effect.

The Cotton Research and Promotion Act (7 U.S.C. 2101-2118) (Act) provides that administrative proceedings must be exhausted before parties may file suit in court. Under section 12 of the Act, any person subject to an order may file with the Secretary of Agriculture (Secretary) a petition stating that the order, any provision of the plan, or any obligation imposed in connection with the order is not in accordance with law and requesting a modification of the order or to be exempted therefrom. Such person is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing, the Secretary would rule on the petition. The Act provides that the District Court of the United States in any district in which the person is an inhabitant, or has his principal place of business, has jurisdiction to review the Secretary's ruling, provided a complaint is filed within 20 days from the date of the entry of ruling.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

In accordance with the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) [5 U.S.C. 601-612], the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has examined the economic impact of this rule on small

entities. The purpose of the RFA is to fit regulatory actions to the scale of businesses subject to such action so that small businesses will not be unduly or disproportionately burdened. The Small Business Administration defines, in 13 CFR part 121, small agricultural producers as those having annual receipts of no more than \$750,000 and small agricultural service firms (importers) as having receipts of no more than \$7,000,000. In 2014, an estimated 16,000 producers, and approximately 20,000 importers were subject to the order. The majority of these producers and importers are small businesses under the criteria established by the Small Business Administration.

There are no Federal rules that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this rule.

Only those eligible persons who are in favor of conducting a referendum would need to participate in the sign-up period. Of the 46,220 total valid ballots received in the 1991 referendum, 27,879, or 60 percent, favored the amendments to the Order, and 18,341, or 40 percent, opposed the amendments to the Order. This proposed rule would provide those persons who are not in favor of the continuance of the Order amendments an opportunity to request a continuance referendum.

The eligibility and participation requirements for producers and importers are substantially the same as the rules that established the eligibility and participation requirements for the 1991 referendum, and for the 1997, 2001, and 2007 sign-up periods. The sign-ups in 1997, 2001, and 2007 sign-ups did not generate the required number of signatures to hold another referendum. The amendments proposed in this action would update various dates, name changes, addresses, and make other miscellaneous changes.

The proposed sign-up procedures would not impose a substantial burden or have a

significant impact on persons subject to the Order, because participation is not mandatory, not all persons subject to the Order are expected to participate, and USDA will determine producer and importer eligibility. The information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act are minimal.

Paperwork Reduction Act

The information collections proposed by this rule will be carried out under the OMB Control Number 0581-0093. This rule will not add to the overall burden currently approved by OMB and assigned OMB Control Number 0581-0093 under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35). This OMB Control Number is referenced in section 1205.541 of the regulations.

Background

The 1991 amendments to the Cotton Research and Promotion Order (7 CFR part 1205) were implemented following the July 1991 referendum. The amendments were provided for in the Cotton Research and Promotion Act (7 U.S.C. 2101-2118) amendments of 1990. These amendments provided for: (1) Importer representation on the Cotton Board by an appropriate number of persons, to be determined by USDA, who import cotton or cotton products into the U.S., and whom USDA selects from nominations submitted by importer organizations certified by USDA; (2) assessments levied on imported cotton and cotton products at a rate determined in the same manner as for U.S. cotton; (3) increasing the amount USDA can be reimbursed for the conduct of a referendum from \$200,000 to \$300,000; (4) reimbursing government agencies that assist in administering the collection of assessments on imported cotton and cotton products; and (5) terminating the right of producers to demand a refund of assessments.

On May 29, 2013, USDA issued a determination based on its review (78 FR 32228), not to conduct a referendum regarding the 1991 amendments to the Order; however, the Act provides that USDA shall nevertheless conduct a referendum at the request of 10 percent or more of the total number of eligible producers and importers that voted in the most recent referendum. The Act provides for a sign-up period during which eligible cotton producers and importers may request that USDA conduct a referendum on continuation of the 1991 amendments to the Order. Accordingly, USDA will provide all eligible Upland cotton producers and importers an opportunity to request a continuance referendum regarding the 1991 amendments to the Order.

Pursuant to section 8(c) of the Act, the sign-up period will be provided for all eligible producers and importers. Eligible cotton producers would be provided the opportunity to sign-up to request a continuance referendum in person at the county Farm Service Agency (FSA) office where their farm is located. If a producer's land is in more than one county, the producer shall sign-up at the county office where FSA administratively maintains and processes the producer's farm records. Producers may alternatively may request a sign-up form in the mail from the same office or through the USDA, AMS Web site: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/Cotton> and return it to their FSA office or return their signed request forms to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Attention: Cotton Sign-Up, P.O. Box 23181, Washington, DC 20077-8249.

Eligible importers would be provided the opportunity to sign up to request a continuance referendum by downloading a form from the AMS Web site, or request a sign-up form by contacting CottonRP@ams.usda.gov or (540) 361-2726 and return their signed request forms to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Attention: Cotton Sign-

Up, P.O. Box 23181, Washington, DC 20077-8249.

Such request must be accompanied by a copy of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection form 7501 showing payment of a cotton assessment for calendar year 2014. Requests and supporting documentation should be mailed to USDA, AMS, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Attention: Cotton Sign-Up, P.O. Box 23181, Washington, DC 20077-8249.

The sign-up period will be from May 11, 2015, until May 22, 2015. Producer and importer forms shall only be counted if received by USDA during the stated sign-up period.

Section 8(c)2 of the Act provides that if USDA determines, based on the results of the sign-up, that 10 percent or more of the total number of eligible producers and importers that voted in the most recent 1991 referendum (i.e., 4,622) request a continuance referendum on the 1991 amendments, a referendum will be held within 12 months after the end of the sign-up period. In counting such requests, however, not more than 20 percent may be from producers from any one state or from importers of cotton. For example, when counting the requests, the AMS Cotton and Tobacco Program would determine the total number of valid requests from all cotton-producing states and from importers. Not more than 20 percent of the total requests will be counted from any one state or from importers toward reaching the 10 percent for 4,622 total signatures required to call for a referendum. If USDA determines that 10 percent or more of the number of producers and importers who voted in the most recent referendum favor a continuance referendum, a referendum will be held.

This proposed rule would amend the procedures for the conduct of the current sign-up period. The current rules and regulations provide for sections on definitions, supervision of the sign-up period, eligibility, participation in the sign-up period, counting requests, reporting results

and instructions and forms.

In sections 1205.20, 1205.26, and 1205.27 "calendar year 2006" would change to "calendar year 2014." Also, in section 1205.26, eligible persons are further defined to ensure that all producers that planted cotton during 2014 will be eligible to participate in the sign-up period. In sections 1205.27, 1205.28, and 1205.29 sign-up period conduct dates, FSA reporting dates, and mailing addresses have been updated. In section 1205.27(b), AMS is proposing to post information in its Web site rather than mailing a form to each known importer. Before the start of the sign-up period, AMS will post sign-up information, including sign-up forms, on its Web site: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/Cotton>.

A 10-day comment period is determined to be appropriate because these proposed eligibility and participation requirements are substantially the same as the eligibility and participation requirements that were used in previous referenda and a sign-up period; participation is voluntary; and this rule, if adopted, should be made effective as soon as possible in order to conduct the sign-up at the earliest possible dates.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 1205

Advertising, Agricultural research, Cotton, Marketing agreements, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

7 CFR part 1205, sections 1205.10 through 1205.30

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR part 1205 is proposed to be amended as follows:

Part 1205-COTTON RESEARCH AND PROMOTION

1. The authority citation part 1205 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 2101-2118 and 7 U.S.C. 7401.

2. Section 1205.20 is revised to read as follows:

§ 1205.20 Representative period.

The term representative period means the 2014 calendar year.

3. In § 1205.26, paragraphs (a)(1) and (2) are revised to read as follows:

§ 1205.26 Eligibility.

* * * * *

(a) * * *

(1) Any person who was engaged in the production of Upland cotton during calendar year 2014; and

(2) Any person who was an importer of Upland cotton and imported Upland cotton in excess of the value of \$2.00 per line item entry during calendar year 2014.

* * * * *

4. Section 1205.27 is revised to read as follows:

§ 1205.27 Participation in the sign-up period.

The sign-up period will be from May 11, 2015, until May 22, 2015. Those persons who favor the conduct of a continuance referendum and who wish to request that USDA conduct such a referendum may do so by submitting such request in accordance with this section. All requests must be received by the appropriate USDA office by May 22, 2015.

(a) Before the sign-up period begins, FSA shall establish a list of known, eligible, Upland cotton producers in the county that it serves during the representative period, and AMS shall also establish a list of known, eligible Upland cotton importers.

(b) Before the start of the sign-up period, AMS will post sign-up information, including sign-up forms, on its Web site: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/Cotton>. Importers who favor the conduct of a continuance referendum can download a form from the Web site, or request a sign-up form by contacting CottonRP@ams.usda.gov or (540) 361-2726 and one will be provided to them. Importers may participate in the sign-up period by submitting a signed, written request for a continuance referendum, along with a copy of a U.S. Customs and Border Protection form 7501 showing payment of a cotton assessment for calendar year 2014. The USDA, AMS, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Attention: Cotton Sign-Up, P.O. Box 23181, Washington, DC 20077-8249 shall be considered the polling place for all cotton importers. All requests and supporting documents must be received by May 22, 2015.

(c) Each person on the county FSA office lists may participate in the sign-up period. Eligible producers must date and sign their name on the "County FSA Office Sign-up Sheet." A person whose name does not appear on the county FSA office list may participate in the sign-up period. Such person must be identified on FSA-578 during the representative period or provide documentation that demonstrates that the person was a cotton producer during the representative period. Cotton producers not listed on the FSA-578 shall submit at least one sales receipt for cotton they planted during the representative period. Cotton producers must make requests to the county FSA office where the producer's farm is located. If the producer's land is in more than one county, the producer shall make request at the county office where FSA administratively maintains and processes the producer's farm records. It is the responsibility of the person to provide the information needed by the county FSA office to determine eligibility. It is not the responsibility of the county FSA office to obtain this information. If any person whose name

does not appear on the county FSA office list fails to provide at least one sales receipt for the cotton they produced during the representative period, the county FSA office shall determine that such person is ineligible to participate in the sign-up period, and shall note "ineligible" in the remarks section next to the person's name on the county FSA office sign-up sheet. In lieu of personally appearing at a county FSA office, eligible producers may request a sign-up form from the county FSA office where the producer's farm is located. If the producer's land is in more than one county, the producer shall make the request for the sign-up form at the county office where FSA administratively maintains and processes the producer's farm records. Such request must be accompanied by a copy of at least one sales receipt for cotton they produced during the representative period. The appropriate FSA office must receive all completed forms and supporting documentation by May 22, 2015.

7. In § 1205.28, the first sentence is revised to read as follows:

§ 1205.28 Counting.

County FSA offices and FSA, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (DAFO), shall begin counting requests no later than May 22, 2015. * * *

8. Section 1205.29 is revised to read as follows:

§ 1205.29 Reporting results.

(a) Each county FSA office shall prepare and transmit to the state FSA office, by June 1, 2015, a written report of the number of eligible producers who requested the conduct of a referendum, and the number of ineligible persons who made requests.

(b) DAFO shall prepare, by June 1, 2015, a written report of the number of eligible importers who requested the conduct of a referendum, and the number of ineligible persons who

made requests.

(c) Each state FSA office shall, by June 1, 2015, forward all county reports to DAFO. By June 8, 2015, DAFO shall forward its report of the total number of eligible producers and importers that requested a continuance referendum, through the sign-up period, to the Deputy Administrator, Cotton and Tobacco Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, 100 Riverside Parkway, Suite 101, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 22406.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 2101-2118.

Dated: April 6, 2015.

Rex A. Barnes,
Associate Administrator.

BILLING CODE 3410-02P

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